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► **To cite this version:**

Detelina Tocheva. ‘They work in a closed circle’: self-sufficiency in house-based rural tourism in the Rhodope mountains, Bulgaria. Stephen Gudeman and Chris Hann (eds). *Oikos and Market: Explorations of Self-Sufficiency after Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books: 137-161, 2015. halshs-03091274

HAL Id: halshs-03091274

<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-03091274>

Submitted on 30 Dec 2020

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Detelina Tocheva. 2015a. "‘They work in a closed circle’: self-sufficiency in house-based rural tourism in the Rhodope mountains, Bulgaria." In Stephen Gudeman and Chris Hann (eds.). *Oikos and Market: Explorations of Self-Sufficiency after Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books: 137-161.

“They Work in a Closed Circle”

Self-Sufficiency in House-Based Rural Tourism in the Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria

Detelina Tocheva

Studying house-based rural tourism in the south-central Rhodope mountains in Bulgaria in 2009-2010, I found that the most successful families in this relatively new business were said to be “working in a closed circle.”¹ If it was in a way true that these families mobilized their members almost fully, there were multiple connections and dependencies on external actors, relationships, and systems that permitted them to be successful in their domestic enterprise. For the local people, the “closed circle” was the best model of economic organization for an entrepreneurial house. Thus, while the few families said to be really “working in a closed circle” were an exception, the study of this exception allows more general insights. The “closed circle” raises a series of questions about the contemporary relevance of the metaphor and about this specific model of domestic organization located at the intersection of the home and the market. I approach this metaphor of self-sufficiency as “an act of redescription” and remodeling (Gudeman 1986: 47). A focus on metaphors used for the economy in general (Gudeman 1986) and for the domestic economy in particular (Gudeman and Rivera 1990) can greatly contribute to an understanding of the ways in which domestic economies operate and interact with larger economic domains. But what does a metaphor of closure say about a domestic livelihood transformed into an entrepreneurial venture in the era of global connections and prevailing interdependence? What does the metaphor convey and conceal about internal relations and relations to the broader economy? I examine the intricacies between a vernacular model of self-sufficiency, household entrepreneurship, gender relations, differentiation within households, and participation in the capitalist market.

In the expression “working in a closed circle” (*rabotia v zatvoren tsikal*), the Bulgarian term *tsikal* means “loop” or “circuit” and semantically

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pertains to the sphere of physics and industrial production. Used in the domain of rural tourism in the Rhodopes, it refers to a specific type of production *and* to human relationships. Thus, translating the expression *zatvoren tsikal* as “closed circle,” which describes at the same time a circular process *and* a connected and limited group of people (rather than “loop” or “closed circuit”), is a good compromise. This phrase and the active form “to close the circle” (*zatvariam tsikala*) are encountered also in other regions in Bulgaria. In the 1990s, “closing the circle” was used by postsocialist cooperative managers to speak of a productive objective they were trying to meet. They wished to produce with the assets of the cooperative members and only for these members in order to limit market exchange to a minimum, considering that they would be losers in any such exchange. In another case, the expression was used by cooperative members to illustrate

their wish to make not only rough produce (milk, meat), but final products (cheese, sausages) in order to sell high-value commodities directly.² In both cases the unit of reference was the cooperative. There were no references to cooperative production in the case presented here, and the villagers did not draw a connection between socialist production and their newly coined ideal of a familial "closed circle."

In rural tourism in the Rhodopes the unit referred to as a circle is the household. "Work in a closed circle" is understood to be the key to entrepreneurial success. "Working in a closed circle" refers to three interrelated ideas: (1) domestic production using only local resources—land, fodder, animals—without external inputs generates "clean" agricultural produce, free of polluting substances; (2) limited dependency on external actors and institutions, such as private employers, the state, and hired labor guarantees better management and efficiency; but this limited dependency also involves participation in market exchange and state mechanisms of redistribution; and (3) self-provisioning through household labor, with all the inequalities and hierarchical relationships it implies, leads to business success. In other words, the local idea of the "closed circle" places value in some households' ability to participate in the market through marketing some part of their domestic economy thanks to the mobilization of all energies within the limits of the house, that is, of nonwage labor.

On the one hand, household production and management testify to a clear preference for fully familial entrepreneurship that excludes the possibility of turning into a standard company, and hence can be seen as a resistance of the domestic domain against market forces. On the other hand, receiving tourists in the rural houses, an activity that Mary Bouquet in her study of family farms in northwest Devon, England, called "the partial commercialization of the domestic domain" (Bouquet 1982: 229), can be interpreted as an unambiguous inroad of the market into the home. Such

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contradictory analyses of the same phenomenon belong to what Norman Long characterized as the trap of "either/or propositions" that attempt to answer the question whether nonwage labor and family cooperation in capitalism are (1) "a transitional phenomenon that will eventually wither away," (2) a form of resistance, or (3) "functional" and "convenient" to the very workings of capitalism (Long 1984: 1).

In some cases, an either/or response is appropriate. June Nash (1994) has argued that considering subsistence production and nonwage work together at times of economic crisis allows insights into the mechanisms of social reproduction in the context of global expansion of capitalism. This approach is certainly supported here. But if in Latin America she detected forms of collective consciousness and mobilization against global capitalism, the Bulgarian villagers with whom I worked do not view their practices of self-provisioning as permitting them to resist or to defeat the market. Neither do they feel that their domestic economy is threatened with disappearance. In other words, what I see is neither resistance nor invasion. Rather, the metaphor of the "closed circle" points toward a particular model of relationships with the market and with state redistribution,³ relationships that valorize a certain kind of domestic self-sufficiency. I argue that an analysis of a vernacular metaphor of household sufficiency and an examination of the empirical realities to which it refers allow insights

into a more complex relationship between a house economy and larger economic domains.

Usually, anthropologists tend to consider the idea of domestic self-sufficiency as a misleading representation imagined by early social theorists who attempted to depict the household economy's remote past and drew the picture of peasant societies in a stereotypical manner, untouched by large-scale production, or even exchange. In fact, some of the early theorists were more subtle. For example, Gerd Spittler shows that Karl Bücher, who coined the phrase "the independent domestic economy" and who was criticized for the unrealistic assumption of a self-sufficient domestic unit, was in fact misread: "... Bücher only means that the domestic economy is designed to supply the needs of the group. This does not exclude the possibility of disposing of surpluses and alleviating temporary shortages with supplies from outside. The unequal gifts of nature are also balanced through exchange between domestic economies or tribes (tribal trade). Labor in common (such as bidden labor) is organized as a rule not within but between domestic economies" (Spittler 2008: 93-94).⁴

In Spittler's interpretation, for Bücher, "the aim of the domestic economy is to be as self-sufficient as possible" (Spittler 2008: 94). Following on Spittler's reading of Bücher, self-sufficiency should not be defined as a withdrawal from exchange in general, and from the market and redistri-

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tribution in particular through total self-provisioning. The analysis should focus on the multiple ideas and realizations of self-sufficiency that point to local knowledge about how to reach a balance between in-house collaboration and production, and external multi-leveled involvements. Thus, the question to ask is rather what are these different ideas and practices of self-sufficiency and how do they occur in a given sociopolitical and economic situation at a given moment in history?

For the Rhodope villagers "a closed circle" is a condition that has to be reached, not an original point of departure or a pristine state of the domestic economy. The expression started to be used in rural tourism in the period of implementation of market economy and while the ever-diminishing welfare state has gained renewed importance for making a living after the demise of socialism. This model of self-sufficiency does not mean "creating a loop from production to consumption to production," though there is a strong idea that the closed circle "marks independence and the borders of the group" (Gudeman 2001: 43). The new realities depicted as a "closed circle" are attained in order to foster a certain form of market participation, not to hinder it in a search for isolation.

The "closed circle" is a model for success in a specific entrepreneurial venture. It encapsulates a definition of the non-expansive entrepreneur, observant of a template of connection and closure. Analyzing entrepreneurs under the changing sociopolitical circumstances of northern Norway in the 1960s, Fredrik Barth used the following classical definition: "an entrepreneur is someone who takes the initiative on administrating resources, and pursues an expansive economic policy" (Barth 1963: 5). Although I share Barth's opinion that entrepreneurship has to be approached in its relation to social change, his definition proves problematic in the case of the Rhodope villagers insofar as the ideal of the household "closed circle" sets limits to the notion of expansion, for the work effort and the assets

mobilized are practically and ideally limited.

Hence, an intrinsic tension characterizes the ideal Rhodope household-entrepreneur in rural tourism. On the one hand, “working in a closed circle” stresses self-provisioning and limitation of the productive energies to the household members. On the other hand, the increasingly global market of rural tourism requires a deep, multi-leveled involvement with a myriad of actors outside the household. The metaphor of “the closed circle” points to people’s awareness of the fact that a certain kind of closure is best suited to help local families reach efficiency in the market. This may be viewed as instrumental means-end behavior. However, it is not purely instrumental, nor is it focused on individual profit maximization or on the pursuit of a hedonistic concept of happiness. Local comments on those households who have successfully engaged in rural tourism by “working in

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a closed circle” also point to hard toil, restless life, and mental overstrain, and hence undermine such explanations.

In what follows, first I introduce the economy of two villages, which I refer to using the pseudonyms Belan and Radino, and I briefly depict the domestic economy. By referring to “work in a closed circle” the villagers gauge the household’s degree of economic success in rural tourism and its inner relationships. I present the motivations for limiting dependency on the outside, as expressed by a member of one of the two most successful local households. Then I turn to the intra- and extra-household relationships, to the internal tensions and differentiation, and to the practical relevance of a smaller unit of reference encompassed within the “closed circle.”

Background

The field research took place between July 2009 and April 2010 and was augmented by four additional trips, the longest of which lasted a month and the shortest a week. Belan and Radino, the two villages where I worked, formed one administrative territorial unit at several points in the past, but now they are officially separate villages. All in all around 500 inhabitants, predominantly of Muslim origin, live there, or 227 households according to the figures of the mayors’ offices.⁵ In comparison with the 1980s, the population has significantly declined: from around a thousand, it had dropped by half. Roughly a hundred out of the 500 registered inhabitants do not live in their village on a permanent basis; these are wage workers, high school youths who spend the week in the town and students who study at the universities of the large cities. Middle-aged and older inhabitants form a majority. The primary school has around 30 children, while in the 1990s there were around 200. But empty streets and quiet yards in the fall and winter sharply differ from the lively environment found in the spring and summer. These seasonal variations are determined by a move to the home village in the summer for dozens of people who live in towns and cities, and by the usual arrival of grandchildren who spend weeks with their grandparents during the summer. Another reason for the changing atmosphere is the seasonal influx of tourists in quest for relaxing holidays in the mountains, country food, and hiking.

The villages are located close to the border with Greece, in the south of the central part of the Rhodope mountains. During socialism, this area was under strict surveillance, with capitalist Greece on the other side. External visitors were denied access most of the time, while locals needed special

permits in order to move even between the two villages. The situation has been reversed since the fall of socialism in 1989. Out-migration sharply in

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creased, especially since the painful economic decline of the region caused by the dismantling of the state-run farms, the closing of small state-owned industries, and the decreased availability of public jobs. Thus, tourists are more welcome than ever.

In the nineteenth century, the Rhodopes were usually depicted as a backward mountain region, inhabited by a mixed Muslim and Christian population, engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry (mostly sheep) with low productivity, very low educational levels, and houses far below the urban standards of that time. In fact, different trades and handicrafts have developed in the Rhodopes. Historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasize that the Rhodope population was integrated within different economic, social, and Ottoman institutional networks (Brunnbauer 2003: 189-191). Muslims more strongly depended on agriculture and sheep breeding, Christians on trade, crafts, and masonry. Overall, the local economy was related to larger economic conditions, such as the demand for wool for the Ottoman army in the nineteenth century. Neither the village communities nor the households were self-sufficient in any significant way. Writing about the nineteenth-century households in the same area where Belan and Radino are situated, Ulf Brunnbauer concludes that

“[t]hey were not isolated monads and, in many cases, did not act autonomously but rather within the networks in which they were integrated. In the case of *Pomak* [Muslim] households, kinship and the village community were the main mechanisms of social integration; Christian households had an additional network, professional organizations that linked them to the wider, and eventually to the global market” (Brunnbauer 2002: 335). Despite this integration into larger networks and the strength of educational and patriotic movements in the Central Rhodopes after the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, the image of material backwardness and lack of economic efficiency was overwhelming, probably due to the devastation of the region by four successive wars in the first half of the twentieth century. The vast projects of socialist modernization in the 1950s and 1960s radically changed life in the area. A few villagers, of Christian and Muslim origin, even occupied high military and administrative positions in the region and in the capital. In these villages, the new state policies introduced electricity and running water, built paved roads, and provided urban facilities that were becoming the norm in other parts of the country. The socialist regime supported kindergartens and schools, and typically opened small industrial plants in the countryside. In the 1970s and 1980s, clothing factories employed thousands of women in the Rhodopes, while the state-owned company for public transportation was the prominent employer of men. But the institution that employed most villagers and that now, in the eyes of the locals, perfectly epitomizes village life in the last decades of socialism is the *“They Work in a Closed Circle”* * 143

state-run cooperative farm with its large number of cattle, sheep, and land cultivated wherever it was physically possible, “even on the worst slopes.” Socialism offered employment opportunities outside of the domestic sphere; having a job was compulsory. Socialist collectivization in the 1950s decisively changed the nature and the prominence of the domestic economy.

Yet, domestic agriculture and animal breeding have never been interrupted in these villages. Every house also sustained itself through work on small plots and care for sheep and cows; there was hardly a house without a stable under socialism. House-based agriculture and animal breeding, whether they were turned toward production for sale or to be consumed within the household, have continuously secured local livelihood. The differentiated involvements of the members of the domestic unit (usually two to three generations), in articulation with employment outside of the home, are a key to understanding the role of domestic production (Creed 1998). The crisis that followed decollectivization in the early 1990s, coupled with the hyperinflation in 1996-1997, resulted in a massive out-migration and in an increased reliance on home produce, not only for those who stayed in the village. Hence, by 2009-2010 house-based production was surely not new; the novelty was the opening of the houses to tourists, an activity that involves a sale of hospitality, agricultural produce, and a way of life. The house economy in the area is mixed, combining multiple sources of income and self-provisioning. A general feature is that village houses have always been owned by those who live in them. At one extreme would be elderly couples or single persons who can afford to live on their old-age pension, do not keep animals, and barely cultivate their land. At the other extreme are households with complex livelihoods, such as a household with three to four generations, with one or two couples based in the village, employed there or commuting daily to the town, with one or two old-age pensioners, all involved in domestic farming and agriculture. Such households add more or less steady incomes to domestic foodstuffs, the combination of all these helping them make a living for themselves and for those (grown up) children and grandchildren who live in the city. Like village inhabitants, city dwellers are faced with alternating periods of paid work and unemployment, with delayed payments being recurrent in the private sector. The village houses produce milk and meat, potatoes, beans and other vegetables that they may sell or consume, without being able to anticipate this. Foodstuffs usually go to the city, while cash may circulate in both directions. Even the few villagers who work in Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom, Austria, Canada, Alaska, or elsewhere tend to come back home and rely on home-grown food for a few months, whether they bring home money or not. Occasional tourism in some houses further complicates the picture. In addition, partaking in a "bed and breakfast" service,

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tourists often wish to taste the local cuisine (home-produced meat, dairy products, vegetables) and buy sacks of potatoes and kilograms of beans to bring along in the city. Some ride horses. All these provide additional income. The houses that receive tourists more regularly and officially have established ways of organizing their internal and external relationships and managing labor, money, and food. Between these two extreme forms of house economy, those who live on their pensions and those who combine a variety of income, lie a whole range of different variants. Local tourism is a business entirely run by families. It is officially encouraged by the state through EU funds, but the few cases of locals who tried to enroll in such programs proved disappointing. Some became heavily indebted to banks as a result for example of officials not having approved their project for EU funding at the latest stage of the procedure when the

construction of an extension of the house was already completed. These experiences discouraged further engagement. Rural tourism (*selski turizam* translates also as “village tourism”) is a seasonal activity and no family makes a living from tourism alone. This activity heavily depends on household agricultural produce, private houses, nonwage labor of family members, and personal connections. The families most successful in tourism, those said to “work in a closed circle,” also receive steady income from salaries and pensions.

The first house in the villages to receive tourists, officially registered in 1999, belongs to the Kamenov family from Belan. Their case is discussed below. The Kamenovs share their fame as the most successful in this business in the area with the Lanov family from Radino. To give an idea of the magnitude of tourism, for a population of about 500 inhabitants altogether, in summer 2011 there were fourteen officially registered guesthouses (two of them were registered as hotels). At least six additional houses have been receiving tourists on an informal and irregular basis over the past few years. In addition, in 2011, there was one hotel and at least four houses that were in the process of construction/renovation with the intention to open the next summer. A family owning a large plot on a hill with barbecue equipment for tourists was building solid bungalows in order to offer overnight accommodation. Even those who do not receive tourists in their houses are involved in this activity in some ways. A few people lent their horses for horse-riding excursions. A large-scale farmer sells lamb, sheep milk, and cheese to the houses receiving tourists, as well as to tourists directly. Villagers sell their potatoes, beans, and occasionally milk and meat to tourists. The villagers own their houses and most of them receive tourists in the house in which they also live. A couple of guesthouses belong to external people, well-known to the locals, who rent them out to tourists and rely on some villagers to provide the tourists with food and services. Some

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guesthouses and two hotels are adjacent to, or located near, the house of the owners.

Through tourism, the local people not only open their houses, but also feel connected to the rest of the country and to the global world through foreign visitors. The house and a way of making a living have become marketable goods. The success of some houses has deeply reshaped local hierarchies and altered earlier patterns of domestic economy. This restructuring of hierarchies and power relationships is also a source of animosity and conflict.

A Metaphor to Gauge Quality, In-House Relations and Business Success

Speech about the “closed circle” is widespread in the area. “Work in a closed circle” implies production of high-quality food. It is also a measure used to gauge business success by describing this success as stemming from a unique pattern of in-house relationships. It is presented as an alternative to fading job opportunities and to dissatisfaction with external workers. The metaphor is used internally and does not belong to the discourse of self-presentation to tourists.

A Vernacular Quality Label

People associate home-produced food with purity. Although only two families are considered to be “really working in a closed circle,” the metaphor

appears in a much larger rhetoric of cleanliness of food present in the countryside as in the world. Thus, this global rhetoric supports the local idea of purity. Locally, ordinary people and politicians alike use the metaphor in this sense. For instance, the mayor of a neighboring village told me that “work in a closed circle” was valorizing because this gave the villagers the possibility “to offer their own produce in their small dining room, local dishes, no GMO [genetically modified organisms]. It is not expensive and it is interesting for the tourist to see, to taste real things.” A woman whose family had recently transformed the third floor of their house into a tourist facility with three rooms and a dining room told me that she used “90 percent of [her] home produce—milk and dairy products, meat, vegetables, tomatoes, cucumbers.” These are in fact produced with the active participation of her parents-in-law, who occupy the ground floor of the house. This house often receives groups who are accommodated elsewhere, but come there for lunch or dinner. The woman opposed “fear” of additives in food in the large cities to trust in the “clean” local home-produced food:

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“Our aim is to use the bio, the homemade, and this is precisely what the tourists look for. Because if you take the food in restaurants, in big cities, sometimes the meat is clean, sometimes it is with additives, and this is what people fear. Here at least I can guarantee that the meat is clean, veal or game.” The absence of considerable quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has been increasingly characteristic of local domestic agriculture since the closing of the collective farm by 1992, through which many were able to receive such products for their personal needs. It is largely claimed that the decline in the use of chemicals and concentrated fodder for cattle and sheep was clearly an outcome of the high market prices that replaced earlier opportunities for cheap provisioning. As a consequence, domestic farming and agricultural produce has indeed become “cleaner.” But an application for an official organic or ecological quality label seems unaffordable. Only the Kamenov house is a member of the international Slow Food organization that defends ecological standards. Most tourists trust word of mouth recommendations in which the cleanliness and quality of food figure prominently. The locals actively incorporate the “organic” discourse in their marketing strategies, in particular because they know the expectations of their tourists who come imbued with ideas of “bio,” “eco,” and “clean” food. But they do not necessarily speak to the tourists of the “closed circle.”

“Everything Swirls”: The Need for Nonwage Workers

Although all villagers who produce on their plots and keep their own animals proudly claim that they consume “clean” produce, not all of them are said to “really work in a closed circle.” The ideal version of “the closed circle” implies not merely house-based “ecologically clean” production, but also one that draws on the mobilization of all household members. Thus, the purity of foodstuffs resonates with the way in which household relationships become harnessed for the sake of business objectives. There are two households, the Lanovs and the Kamenovs, respectively from Radino and Belan, that are said to really work in a “closed circle.” The woman quoted above commented on the Lanovs, her neighbors in Radino: “They realize the closed circle. They produce everything starting with vegetables. This is the best, when you make one closed circle. This

is the best, but this means a lot of work.” Another woman from Radino spoke of the same family. Her own house for tourists works in a different way. She lives in the town with her husband and their two sons who go to college. The family owns a sawmill in the vicinity of the town which they consider to be their main source of income. Their house in the village has been thoroughly refurbished. They rent it to tourists and for events such **“They Work in a Closed Circle”* 147**

as weddings, and rarely stay there themselves. The tourists are allowed to bring their own food and cook it there. Nevertheless, the owners are always ready to provide food if asked. In the outskirts of the town where they live most of the time, they keep sheep. They cultivate potatoes and common vegetables on their land close to the town as well as in the garden surrounding their village house. The family offers home-grown produce: “I don’t have Coca-Cola or Fanta. I take milk and yogurt from my neighbor. We try to use countryside food as much as possible. Here we have a garden with salads, onion, and everybody helps.”

If the tourists ask them to roast a lamb, they take one of their own or buy it from the neighbors. When I asked if this was a “closed circle,” my informant replied by pointing to all the “clean” things they were able to produce as evidence of their family working in a “closed circle.” Then she turned to the idea of self-provisioning with work, which is also referred to by the metaphor:

But one cannot think only of money. If you take [produce] from the neighbor, he will receive some money too. One cannot think only in a closed way. ... By 2006-7 we employed the neighbors on a working contract [to receive our tourists]. But we have less work to offer now. We are in [the town] all the time. ... While the Kamenovs are here all the time. I did not spin up things in the way in which the Lanovs and the Kamenovs did. ... The Lanovs are like this: the mother cooks and makes slippers.⁷ Everything swirls. The grandfather works wood, makes wooden things. And they are all here.

Nonwage work of household members is preferred to hiring other people. It is usually claimed that not paying wages and splitting the profit among the household members is a key to making more money in this business. Yet, as this informant pointed out, not all can afford to operate in this way. One has to be there, to be available, and not only to own accommodation facilities and home foodstuffs. All household members have to be devoted to “spinning up” the business.

One may argue that the possibility to “work in a closed circle” directly depends on the domestic cycle (Chayanov 1986 [1924-5]). This is surely part of the explanation, but it needs two qualifications. First, we are dealing with a society where, despite high rates of unemployment since the middle of the 1990s, salaried work has been the norm from the 1950s onward; hence, a Chayanovian type of peasant household cannot be found and the developmental cycle approach needs to take into account this circumstance (see Leonard and Kaneff 2002). Second, the two local successful households have many members by local standards. There are a few other extended households in the two villages, but the simple nuclear families, or the nuclear families living with one elderly parent, outnumber by far the complex

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ones.⁸ Households that remain complex over more than ten years (as in the case of the Kamenovs) and whose members are often present in the village in order to participate in receiving tourists, such as the Lanovs and the

Kamenovs, are atypical. They do not reproduce socialist or earlier models. Indeed, during the second half of the nineteenth century, “[a] complex household organization was, ... in most cases, only a short-term solution in the household cycle, the length of which depended on the dynamics of the household, demographic realities, and the availability of land” (Brunnbauer 2003: 188-189). Under socialism, the nuclear and slightly extended households (three generations, and/or collaterals) were the norm. In postsocialist Bulgaria, households as large as the Lanovs and the Kamenovs constitute rather a minority. The latter need their many members to stay together because they have become an entrepreneurial unit, and not the other way around. For them, specific circumstances made useful the availability of workers. And it was not the mere availability of workers that guaranteed success in rural tourism, though this was a precondition. How they engaged in rural tourism and why they felt the need to “close the circle” is discussed below.

The Lanov Family Business

Constraints and choices led the Lanovs and the Kamenovs to work within the limits of the household. I briefly examine the first case and then I focus more thoroughly on the second case. The Lanov household comprises eleven members belonging to four generations, all involved in one way or another in the family business (figure 5.1). They own a house that has been adapted to receive tourists since 2007. But their main asset is what they call a “tourist complex,” an area in which they offer accommodation and catering. This major activity was launched officially in 2005. They receive 3,000 to 4,000 tourists per year according to the grandfather’s estimation. The grandfather presents the beginnings as an incidental idea; he had noticed that tourists would stop to rest on his (restituted) land during their hiking trips. This is how he and his friend came up with the idea of building some equipment. Technical support from friends and the making-do system helped accomplish the basic works in the beginning. Yet, village gossip claims that he had acquired a starting capital of around 20,000 EUR from the sale of his father’s old house. One has also to pay attention to the context of declining job opportunities and the slippery market for agricultural produce. The family used to produce annually up to 70 tons of potatoes between the beginning of the 1990s and 2002. When the prices for pesticides went up and the market became far more competitive, the related income declined. In the meanwhile, jobs had become unreliable and salaries

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and wages were an insufficient source of income. In this context, tourism seemed to offer a good supplement. It became more lucrative to sell one’s own produce to tourists instead of exporting it directly to the market. By 2010, the business was officially run by the son; his wife is the only person among the eleven members to have a salaried job in the town. She is however in charge with keeping accounts for the family. Three persons receive old-age pensions. Since the Lanovs have started receiving tourists each year they keep around ten sheep and fifteen lambs, two cows, and two or three calves. They produce around 400 kilos of beans, around two tons of potatoes, and many vegetables. Their own meat and vegetables are usually not enough. This is why “we buy from our neighbors. We try to use everything from the Rhodopes, everything must be natural.” Yet, the Lanovs heavily depend on external suppliers for additional vegetables, pork meat, and

drinks. Their circle is by no means closed.

The grandfather explained why the household preferred to rely on its members. In the summer 2009, they employed two local persons to help when the influx of tourists made the situation unmanageable. These workers were given a very high salary by local standards, and lunch and dinner as an extra. But they wanted more money, started lying, and refused to work, after which they were fired. Now recourse to external helpers was limited to occasional short-term participation of trustworthy neighbors. I asked the grandfather about his opinion about programs for regional development and support to mountain areas, especially for rural tourism, loudly advertised by the government. He spoke of past attempts to set up an application for one such program. The complexity of the procedure was amazing, the number of papers requested was discouraging, and different individuals' expectations about receiving bribes definitely disappointed

Figure 5.1. The Lanov Family.

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them. "It is better to stay within family business," he stated, confirming the general reluctance to apply for official programs usually found in the area.

Why Do the Kamenovs Prefer to Work on Their Own?

The enterprise of each successful family involves a myriad of external connections for supplies, the mobilization of networks of trust, and dependency on state redistribution and private employers. Nonetheless, members of these families reproduce the discourse of a turn inward when they reflect on their business. This implies limiting the circle of work provisioning to the household members and opening this circle in many other respects. I will first give voice to Alex, from the Kamenov family, who explained why the Kamenovs prefer to produce as much as possible and why service to tourists and work related to the family business in general have to be limited to the "closed circle" of nonwage workers.

The Kamenovs have formally engaged in rural tourism since 1999. There are ten of them (figure 5.2). The retired parents have two married sons. Alex, the elder brother, and his wife have a son who got married but has no children yet. The younger brother and his wife Mina have two sons who are still at college. Though the third generation is usually out of the village—the young married couple lives in the neighboring town and the two brothers study in other regions—they go back home when possible and fully participate to helping in the periods of intensive work, such as haymaking, potato harvesting, or chopping firewood. The Kamenovs' two houses share a yard and all animal keeping and agricultural assets. These are the most visited among the houses for tourists in Belan, with more than 3,000 tourists per year.⁹

Rural tourism was an entirely new endeavor; the family had no entrepreneurial experience before socialism. Alex, the elder of the two middle-

Figure 5.2. The Kamenov Family.

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aged brothers, is said to be the backbone of the Kamenovs' tourist business. Trained as a teacher, he is still teaching at the village school where he assumed office as a director a few years ago. According to him, cutoffs in the public sector and unreliable private employers oriented the family toward this new endeavor. With the massive layoffs in the very beginning of the 1990s, the three women lost their jobs, while his brother was only

employed part-time by the border police: “This kind of livelihood [salaries] started to fade away and we began to look for an alternative.” In 1994 they opened the first private grocery store in the village and became the owners of the first private truck. “We started to manage, so to say, individually.” Alex was part of all groups that tried to establish connections with stronger organizations with the objective of developing rural tourism. The idea that the family had to get by somehow was on his mind: “In 2000, but already in 1999, our region was severely affected by the crisis, which meant mainly unemployment resulting from the complete closing of factories and workshops.” As a school teacher, Alex attended municipality meetings at which he heard about the expansion of rural tourism in areas in Western Europe that had been deindustrialized and were situated in attractive natural environments. At one such meeting, a woman spoke of France and of the conditions necessary to start developing rural tourism there: “One does not need serious investment or even land when one has a house, free rooms, a yard, a farm, and especially if one has already some other extras, such as a small shop and marketing opportunities. I started to actually think about our assets in these terms.” Alex decided “to experiment” and established the first association for tourism with a lawyer from the neighboring village. Therefore, his house was the first officially registered in the village. Since that moment, Alex has become the key figure of all initiatives, associations, and projects related to tourism, which also raises conflicts with other villagers. The Kamenovs have already employed external people to help them. The outcome has disappointed them: “If we offer some people jobs as cooks or as hotel maids, then they say ‘Oh no, we don’t want to work for 300 leva [150 EUR].’ Or when they come they sit, they twiddle their thumbs and wait for someone to tell them what to do. I have to go to check their work behind them, to correct and to make a remark.” Former employees told me that for them the work was too hard and the employers’ expectations almost impossible to meet. After having employed a few local women during several summer seasons, they stopped. Over the past two years, the Kamenovs have employed occasionally only customers indebted to their grocery store as a way of paying back their debt.

The withdrawal to the household circle is presented as the result of economic policies and dissatisfaction with external workers. Hence, self-sufficiency in terms of self-provisioning with labor was not the Kamenovs

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starting position; previously they had employees. Yet, their current self-provisioning with nonwage work means only a partial inward turn. There are rather balances between self-provisioning with labor, produce, and other resources, and vital multi-leveled external relationships and flows. The Kamenovs’ “closed circle” functions with internal tensions generated by the unequal power positions of the different house members.

Looking Inside the Kamenovs’ “Closed Circle”

Turning inward in some domains is experienced as protective against external uncertainties; it can even be seen as a precondition to success. I wish to demonstrate, first, that the modalities of this inward turn imply a specific idea of a dynamic balancing between opening and closure. More specifically, “working in a closed circle” is seen as the best way to engage with the larger market; it is not an attempt at isolation. Indeed, the Kamenovs’ “closed circle” is in fact a relatively open one. Besides certain degrees of

self-provisioning with food and labor, they operate a masterful balancing between inflows and outflows, between internal and external connections and commitments. But this “circle” is also the locus of tensions and inequalities. I wish to show also that a pattern of gender relationships, differential circumstances of house owning, and individual external status and connections play a crucial role for intra-household differentiation. The way in which the Kamenovs operate the “closed circle,” that is, how they harness their energies, is determined by the adoption of broader patterns of gender and seniority and, paradoxically perhaps, by their individual status and connections outside of the house. Finally I demonstrate that the “circle” encompasses smaller, distinct economic units of belonging.

Self-Provisioning with Food and Labor

The Kamenovs have reached impressive levels of self-provisioning with foodstuffs. Service to tourists is taken over by household members. There is a common belief among villagers engaged in rural tourism that offering domestic produce to guests is the prerequisite for making profit. As Alex put it: “This is where profit comes from, otherwise you don’t earn anything.” The strong local idea that self-provisioning through nonwage work secures domestic subsistence by limiting outflows of cash extends to the sphere of tourism; domestic produce would limit the expenses and would bring profit. Indeed, the Kamenovs produce a lot compared to other vil-

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lage houses; Alex claimed that 99 percent of what they offer to tourists is domestic produce. Practice, however, points to knowledgeable and skillful management of, on the one hand, productive energies inside the house and, on the other hand, inflows and outflows of cash and produce.

The Kamenovs keep animals together: each year, they have usually two calves, two cows, eight sheep and more than a dozen lambs, more than thirty rabbits, three horses, and chickens. They cultivate around 0.5 hectares of potatoes, part of which they sell, and another part of which they eat and cook for tourists. They produce and offer milk, yogurt, and some dairy specialties. This is hardly enough to feed all their tourists, so that meat, vegetables, fruits, and drinks regularly come from other villagers or from the outside. The Kamenovs know well their suppliers with whom they have established long-term relationships. A local large-scale farmer sells lambs to all guesthouses and the Kamenovs figure prominently among his best clients. The Kamenovs advertise their food as homemade, locally produced, or bought from a trustworthy supplier to stress its purity.

The Kamenovs invest a huge amount of labor to keep the agricultural and farming activities going. The grandmother likes to say that “laziness has been eliminated from the Kamenovs.” Other villagers acknowledge the Kamenovs’ hard work, too. Each of them participates in different ways in the daily care for animals, but also in haymaking, wood chopping, and agricultural activities. All of them stress this full participation. However, the allocation of tasks follows some gender lines. Laundry and room tidying are chiefly female activities, which means in practice that they are done by the two wives of the second generation, and occasionally by Alex’s young daughter-in-law when the young couple is back to Belan. While everyone participates in the kitchen in certain ways, specialties are prepared by the grandmother, who is proud of her three-year experience as a cook in socialist times in a prestigious restaurant in Bulgaria’s second largest city. Alex’s

brother's wife Mina also often cooks. Alex's wife milks the cows twice a day. Mina makes herself available during the day for any purpose, because she is in a way in the house, since she works in the family shop located on the ground floor of Alex's house. In the evening, all must be there to serve food and take care of the guests. This intensive daily collaboration implies a feeling of permanent togetherness. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the Kamenovs often present a homogenizing discourse about themselves by emphasizing that they have their meals together, share efforts, and manage to overcome conflicts and tensions that, as all of them claim, sometimes do occur between them. Nonetheless, everyone has a different position within the family business and not everyone is equally dis/satisfied with his or her position.

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External Participations, Internal Inequalities, and Different Units of Belonging

Two intertwined factors need to be analyzed to highlight how the Kamenovs' "closed circle" works in practice: their connections and involvements beyond the household and their internal differentiation. The harsh economic crisis, especially unemployment since the 1990s, has continued to afflict a significant part of the population. The withering of a livelihood based on salary was pointed out by Alex as the initial reason for the family to look for alternative ways to make a living; neither employers nor the welfare system could be trusted anymore, he claimed. Nonetheless, if one looks at the circumstances of the house members over the past few years, nothing evidences mistrust in state welfare. Nor do they retreat from allegedly dying-out salaried work. The Kamenovs earn money from jobs and pensions and use the state welfare system, skillfully combining these assets with their tourist business. The general level of salaries and pensions is rather low in the region. The two are nevertheless very much appreciated. While salaries and pensions provide the Kamenovs with some money and entitle them to public health care and social benefits, tourism brings more significant income. Everyone's specific relation to external employers and external engagements have influenced internal relationships within their "closed circle." Gender and seniority play a role as well. Profit from food offered to the tourists is split between the two couples of the second generation. Each couple puts together money earned through salaries and pensions. There are no significant differences in the level of the salaries. The pensions are slightly lower than the salaries, but close to the general level in the village. Ultimately the three nuclear families of the household spend and save separately from each other.

While the grandmother was unemployed when the family opened their shop, she has retired since then, so that she and the grandfather receive old-age pensions. The grandmother claimed that they could use their "full pensions." Usually, elderly people use their pensions to pay the bills for the basic monthly needs such as electric, water, taxes, and telephone. All families appreciate having a pensioner in the house because the old-age state-provided pension means the house is able to meet those expenses. The Kamenovs' grandmother referred to her and her husband's pensions as "full" in the sense that they do not pay any bills. How has this exceptional situation become possible? In all houses receiving tourists, electric, water, and other bills related to housekeeping are considered together, that is,

there is no separate accounting for the house members' consumption on one side, and the tourists' consumption on the other side. As the old couple helps receive the guests—the grandfather takes care also of the sheep and

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cattle; the grandmother cooks and helps in the kitchen—the grandmother considers they deserve not to pay bills as a counterpart. The bills are paid from the overall income from tourism. This places the old couple in a privileged position among other retired villagers. Every summer the old Kamenovs go for two weeks of vacation to the seaside or elsewhere. This practice begun under socialism for all categories—workers, schoolchildren, pensioners—and was generalized since the 1970s, but has been abandoned especially by the other retired villagers since the crisis in the 1990s. Alex is the director of the school, in addition to being the president of the local association for tourism, a deputy head of the committee of the village house of culture (*chitalishte*), and a member of several local and regional associations. These commitments to public life directly contribute to enhance his control over decisions at the village level, which allows him to advertise the family guesthouse and to bring average tourists as well as well-heeled guests, such as politicians and businessmen. Alex's wife is the head of the shirt-making factory of the village, which employs around thirty women. Alex's brother is an officer in the border police. All three receive a regular salary. Alex's brother's wife Mina has the most unsteady income. She took over the grocery store.

This store was initially established in the name of Alex's wife, but since she found a stable job in the shirt-making factory, unemployed Mina became the shopkeeper. Four other grocery stores were created in the meantime. Enhanced competition coupled with out-migration meant decreased sales. Mina's two sons left to study and Mina and her husband have been providing for them to allow them to study in good schools. In contrast, Alex's son has a job in the administration of the regional town, though he and his wife are not completely independent from the income of their parents. Mina's income is her profit from the shop. Commodities from this shop are usually taken for free by the whole family. As they eat together every day, taking for free foodstuffs and other items from the shop seems to them justified. As the grandmother put it: "We take cheese, bread, everything from the shop. In practice, it feeds us," in addition of course to what they produce by themselves. Mina is supposed to keep the accounts for the grocery store in a way that would allow her to keep a "salary" for herself too. But, as she confides to close friends, there are months when she ends up not making any money for herself. As each one keeps money income from salaries and pensions for him- or herself, Mina and her husband are the most disadvantaged. She is the only one without a regular income from the outside. Thus, belonging more than the others to the "closed circle," in addition to facing high cost for her children's studies, puts her nuclear family in an unfavorable position. Not only does the practice of taking commodities from the store without paying engender differentiation, but it fosters another inequality deriving

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from another line of division within the Kamenov household. The latter stems from a traditional regional pattern of house ownership that privileges older sons for a period of time. This model of seniority means that older sons who get married would move to a new house, while the youngest one

would stay with his parents even when he gets married and has children (see Brunnbauer 2003: 188-189). He is the one who would inherit the parents' house. This model is more or less followed in practice. The Kamenovs did stick to it. The Kamenovs have two houses. The first one was built in the 1960s by the old couple and by their parents. This is where Alex and his brother grew up. In 1984, still a just married young man, Alex built his own house on the large plot next to his parents' house. This is where he and his wife live now and where the grocery store is located. The older house belongs to the old parents, who occupy the ground floor. Alex's younger brother and his wife Mina live in this house too. Their rooms upstairs are also used to accommodate tourists. Usually, tourists are accommodated at Alex's house, but when it is full the tourists are accommodated in the old parents' house, in the rooms of Mina and her husband. This is why in the high season Mina and her husband, and their children when they are at home, stay in the house of Mina's mother, located in the same village. The two couples of the second generation divide into equal shares profit made from food offered to the tourists, but each couple keeps whatever comes from the overnight accommodation, depending on the house in which the tourists are accommodated. This means that Alex and his wife make more money from accommodating tourists than Mina and her husband. In addition, the two sons are unequally established within the household, the elder brother owning his own house, the younger one having to move constantly, in the summer, between the house of his parents and that of his wife's mother, since the couple spends the night in this latter house but works and takes meals with the other Kamenovs. Alex's son receives a salary, but he and his wife are supported by Alex and his wife. Alex's young daughter-in-law is still enrolled at the university and his son's salary is relatively low. Village gossip reports that when the young couple leaves to go to the town at the end of the weekend, their parents and grandparents give them bulky bags of food and other things. Although Mina's sons are equally loved by the family members and are offered food and money too, being relatively young and pursuing their education, they do not earn any money. The different situations of the third generation, in addition to the unequal income from tourism, place the two couples of the second generation in fairly different positions. It is therefore little surprise that when in a conversation with Alex I asked whether their family (without specifying whom I meant) had savings, he answered "Yes," which is a noticeably rare answer in the village. In a conversation with Mina, she responded

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"No" to the same question and even added "We have debts." Both declared that tourism was their major source of income. But each spoke of his or her nuclear family. Within the household circle of shared work effort, spending and saving belong to the distinct domain of the nuclear family. If the unit of reference of the metaphor of self-sufficiency is the household, this metaphor leaves aside the simultaneous practical relevance of the nuclear family as an economic unit and the advantages and disadvantages related to each member's structural position. All four nuclear units within the Kamenov household are in a different economic situation. The imbalance between the two couples of the second generation is enhanced by Alex's outside image as the Kamenovs' leader. Alex has a reputation for being a smart businessman and an all-powerful school director who uses his erudition and connections

to extend the power of his family and profit from tourism.

The Kamenovs have a strong presence in the village; they are members of the folk dance club and the tourist association that some earlier members say they have left in order to escape from the over-dominant position of the Kamenovs. Their participation is remarkable; no matter how tiring the workday has been; they never miss a folk dance rehearsal or some public meeting related to the life of the village. Their house is the only local house member of the international Slow Food organization; they are the first family to work with a travel agency for alternative tourism; they have received high level politicians and prominent businessmen; in summer 2010 they offered a horse-riding excursion to the American ambassador and to a former Bulgarian minister of Foreign Affairs during their private visit to the Rhodopes. Alex has close relationships with local- and national level politicians, which has actually proven to be of benefit not only to the family business, but also to the school. Alex has good relationships with other houses for tourists, when he is not in conflict with them. He is able to make a connection between his tourists and the locals who can offer entertainment such as live music, cave visits, canoeing, or rock climbing. These connections and ability to mobilize wide networks are admired by some villagers; others, however, dislike him for his authoritarian behavior and his roughness toward simple people, as well as sometimes toward Mina, his own wife, and his daughter-in-law.

The Kamenovs' "closed circle" is marked by tense relationships inside and outside. It functions according to patterns of gendered roles and seniority within the household. In addition, the individual status and connections of everyone outside the house determine to a large extent the Kamenovs' internal relationships and status inequality. Looking at their overall economic model, the Kamenovs appear to be virtuosos of astute balancing between external involvement and in-house collaboration. All external connections and participations in community life and beyond contribute to the success

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of their family business. But they pay a high price, suffering from physically and mentally exhausting workdays and the resentment of many villagers.

Why a Closed Circle?

The current era of a bewilderingly complex global economy has not erased the centrality of the domestic economy. There are numerous models of domestic livelihood that go together with deepening economic uncertainty and competition. Amid such multiplicity, the vernacular emphasis on household sufficiency under a local form of neoliberal capitalism attests to the relevance of an ideal of self-sufficiency in this context of uncertainty and instability. This recent emphasis also indicates that the importance of household sufficiency is historically contingent, not evolutionarily determined. The implementation of a template of self-sufficiency is not opposed to market participation; to the contrary, in this case study, it has proven a convenient facilitator of market participation, without however meaning that the domestic economy is turning into a standard enterprise.

While the metaphor stresses closure, other discourses and practices point to a variety of forms of openness. Indeed, other local discourses and practices emphasize flows, connections, exchange, and external involvements. Tourism itself is locally practiced as a form of opening one's own house to external visitors. These two aspects have a dialectical relation.

They can be seen as the two sides of the coin of the domestic economy. But why, then, has this metaphor of self-sufficiency gained such prominence? My answer is that the metaphor reveals where people place value.

“Having connections” (*da imash vrazki*) was the most appreciated thing in socialist times; in Bulgaria the expression was widespread and pointed to the understanding that informal relationships beyond the household were able to provide not simply access to things and services, but also status and good life. Comparatively, it is a striking shift that contemporary Rhodope villagers state that “closing the circle” is the best way to come to terms with the local form of market economy. This does not mean that external connections are disregarded. But people choose to stress metaphorically the other side of the coin. Indeed, “working in a closed circle” locates value in internal cooperation. The model sets limits to market participation, for this house-based enterprise cannot grow once it has reached the cultural and physical limits of domestic work and collaboration. If the “closed circle” is so celebrated locally, this is not because the people cannot imagine working in another way; actually many work in other ways. One of the most important implications of the model is to help people regain a feeling of control precisely at the moment when they are engaging with the dynamic, unpre-

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dictable market of rural tourism. Representing the ideal entrepreneurial domestic economy as a “closed circle” creates the possibility to frame it as a fully controllable domain in opposition to external uncertainties. Thus, this feeling of control is projected onto the realm in which the people strive to participate, which is the otherwise uncontrollable market. Production in a “closed circle” also generates “clean” food as opposed to food “with additives” available beyond the “closed circle.” Then, in another register, it is the cradle of purity. The efficiency of work and the quality of produce, described

as two areas of closure, taken together guarantee the best possible participation in the market.

Figure 5.3. Map of Detelina Tocheva’s Field Site.

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Detelina Tocheva received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* with a study of child protection in Estonia. Her first postdoctoral project, also based at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, concerned post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy in northwestern Russia. She has published numerous papers on these subjects in journals such as *Anthropological Quarterly* and *European Journal of Sociology*.

Notes

1. This chapter continues the analysis begun in Tocheva 2015, which provides more background information about the main locality researched, together with detailed acknowledgements.
2. For these personal communications I am grateful to Gerald Creed and Alik Angelidou, respectively.
3. I am grateful to Mihály Sárkány for pointing out to me the importance of state redistribution, an element that I had already stressed but not to the degree it deserved.
4. This is a fairly different reading from the way Sahlins used Bücher’s idea (Sahlins

1972: 76, passim) to claim that the domestic mode of production in primitive societies was the cause for “underproduction” and that only external political forces would incite the domestic units to produce above that level (Ibid.: 41-148).

5. These figures mean that there is an average of two persons per household. They reflect the way in which the mayor’s office defines a household. An elderly person, though living with the family of her married son or daughter and their children, is usually considered as a separate household. The same goes for a child who is grown up and earns a salary, even though he or she still lives with his or her parents.

6. Ghodsee (2010) examines the socially and economically devastating effects of postsocialist privatization in a nearby area of the Rhodopes where the socialist regime had developed mining. Privatization in the Rhodopes, as elsewhere in the country, took the form of large-scale elite-driven embezzlement that undermined entire sectors of the economy (see Ganev 2007).

7. “The mother” in question is in fact the oldest grandmother in the Lanovs’ house. She is known as a skillful seamstress, able to make beautiful slippers sold to tourists.

8. In addition, new patterns of mobility, mainly related to temporary employment, make it difficult to trace the boundaries of the village households. Many families own or rent an apartment in the nearby town; some of their members commute weekly, or even several times per week.

9. None of the family members was able to give me exact figures, but they claimed they had surely more than 3,000 visitors annually.

10. In the Devon case study by Mary Bouquet, the practice of taking tourists in the farm houses was entirely controlled by women and had led to a rise in their status within their own houses as well as in the local community (Bouquet 1982, 1984).

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